

## *The Lull Before the Storm*

Kenneth R. "Ken" Plum

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The assumption that the time period after an election gives winning candidates an opportunity for rest and relaxation is mistaken, at least for state legislators. While some elected officials are able to steal away for a few days, the pace of legislative-related activities and events between Election Day November 4 and the startup of the General Assembly session on January 14 is intense.

While candidates for the House of Delegates and State Senate have been busy for much of the year getting themselves elected or re-elected to office, those persons and organizations with business to come before the legislature have been busy developing their legislative proposals. The short time after Election Day and before the opening of the legislative session is the window of opportunity for presenting these proposals.

In the weeks before the opening of the session, the volume of mail to legislators increases. For many, their initial or only contact with legislators will be letters and packets of information sent through the mail. In order to be sure they are noticed, some groups will do a mailing to legislators each week or at some interval to emphasize or drive home their point. Others start letter writing campaigns to ensure that legislators hear from a number of different constituents or interested parties.

Other organizations prefer to present their proposals in person. While a few will seek meetings with individual legislators, most schedule events at which information can be presented to an entire delegation of legislators. The real difficulty in such an approach is finding the time at which the greatest number of legislators can meet. For that reason, most events are scheduled around a meal. Regardless of how busy one may be, you have to take time to eat. These meetings are held at breakfast, lunch, cocktail hour, and dinner. Already on my schedule are meal time meetings with mental health advocates, women attorneys, children advocates, bankers, and others. Other public bodies like the Board of Supervisors, School Board, colleges, and judges also have meetings around meals.

Cynics of the system suggest that the meal or the cocktail party is supposed to influence legislators' votes. I have never attended a banquet meal or stood around for hours at cocktail parties that I thought had any reasonable chance of influencing a vote based on the meal or the party. These events do provide a relaxed atmosphere for advocates and legislators to get to know each other and to exchange ideas.

Other avenues for communicating with legislators include the delegation and individual legislator public hearings held before the session.

Between now and the opening of the General Assembly session is a busy time, but it pales in comparison to the legislative session when nearly 3,000 bills and resolutions and a biennial budget will be considered. Also, during the session the traditional "lobbying" by more than 700 professionals will take place.

Take advantage of the "lull" before the storm to communicate your ideas and suggestions to me at [kenplum@aol.com](mailto:kenplum@aol.com), by phone at 703-758-9733, or by mail at 2073 Cobblestone Lane, Reston, VA 20191. I am busy, but I do need to hear from you. Your recommendations will be taken seriously.